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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000567

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SA](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: FM STILL HOPING TO BRING MINISTERS TO BAGHDAD; HAD
POSITIVE TRIP TO SAUDI ARABIA

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Daniel V. Speckhard for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. CDA Speckhard and PolCouns met with Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari February 15 to discuss the FM's trip to Saudi Arabia and the upcoming neighbors' conference the Iraqis hope to host in Baghdad in mid-March. Zebari described his trip to Saudi Arabia to reopen the Iraqi Embassy and Consulate as "successful," noting that the Saudis reacted well to his message that they needed to to play a more active and constructive role. On the neighbors' conference, Zebari said that Egypt is the only remaining country whose views he does not yet know. He said the Saudis suggested Baghdad host an initial meeting for Deputy Ministers and that a Ministerial conference should follow outside of Iraq--although the Saudis did not even commit definitively to sending a sub-ministerial participant. Zebari said that Prince Saud admitted their hesitation to attend a senior-level conference in Baghdad was based on "political and not security" reasons. Zebari resisted suggestions to change the planned March 11-12 conference to a sub-ministerial event, preferring to keep pushing for ministerial representation. He agreed that it would probably be possible to make an announcement about the conference in the near future, but stated he needed some more time to talk about his options. End Summary.

THE MARCH 11-12 REGIONAL CONFERENCE: INVITEES RESPOND

¶2. (C) The FM stated that Turkey, Syria, Iran, and the United Nations have accepted the GOI invitation to attend a Ministerial-level conference in Baghdad. Zebari assessed that the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) would attend, and that the Jordanians are "ready to come" although they continue to push the Iraqis to encourage as many countries as possible to send Ministers. The Kuwaitis, the FM said, support holding the conference in Baghdad but want the conference to be held following a planned Arab League Summit meeting on March 28. The Bahrainis support the conference but want it held in Erbil. The FM will speak with the Egyptian Ambassador either February 15 or 16 and request their support. The FM noted that speaking with the Egyptians and convincing them to attend remains a key issue. As for the Arab League, Zebari said he told them that he is proceeding with the conference "with or without them." Zebari concluded that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is proceeding as if a Ministerial-level conference will occur, including making logistical and security arrangements.

SAUDIS HESITANT TO SUPPORT MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE IN BAGHDAD

¶3. (C) The Saudis support holding the conference in Baghdad "in principle," Zebari said. HRH Prince Saud al-Faisal,

Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs, told Zebari, that the Saudi hesitation to send a high-level delegation to a Baghdad-based conference is for "political not security" reasons. If they attend, Zebari explained, it signifies their support for Prime Minister Maliki's government which the Saudis view as sectarian. According to Zebari, the Saudis intimated that if they could see changes in the GOI then they could reconsider their position. Zebari's response, he said, was to remind the Saudis that the Baghdad Security Plan would be such a test and that the PM has already demonstrated a non-sectarian approach to the plan's implementation.

¶4. (C) Prince Saud suggested that the GOI hold a lower-level meeting with Deputy Ministers or Director Generals in Baghdad to be followed by a meeting with Ministers outside of Iraq--but he did not commit to participating in either. According to Zebari when he raised the idea of including the P5 or G8 Ambassadors in the conference, al-Faisal "did not object" and even agreed that it could "be a good step" to bring everyone together.

ZEBARI FIRM THAT BAGHDAD CONFERENCE SHOULD BE FOR MINISTERS

¶5. (C) The CDA responded that Washington is supportive of Zebari's initiative and wants to help move it forward. He noted, however, that it might be difficult to bring all the regional Ministers to Baghdad at this time. As an alternative, the CDA suggested hosting a sub-ministerial conference in Baghdad in either late February or March; a Ministerial conference in Cairo in either March or April; and a larger conference to include both neighboring countries and

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P5/G8 representatives.

¶6. (C) Zebari responded that there is the problem of conflicting dates, noting that the Arab League Summit planned for March 28 is preceded by preparatory meetings February 25-26. However, a conference in Baghdad on March 11-12 could produce results that could then be presented at the Arab League Summit, Zebari explained. While agreeing that he might need to eventually accept that Ministers will not attend a conference in Baghdad, he is now "sticking to his guns," and calling the Baghdad meeting a conference for neighboring Ministers. He added that the attendance of P5 Ambassadors at the Baghdad conference remains an "attractive" prospect. Zebari concluded by commenting that he still needs to speak to a couple of people and that within the next couple of days he should have a more defined idea as to what the conference will look like. The CDA stated that it will be important for this conference, wherever it is held, to be Iraqi-led and to that end it would be better if the GOI announced the conference(s) as soon as possible.

SAUDI TRIP: POSITIVE MEETINGS, ENCOURAGING MORE ENGAGEMENT

¶7. (C) Describing his trip to Saudi Arabia as "very successful," Zebari said he sensed a different attitude from the Saudis. They were more "engaged," he said, citing as an example his two hour meeting with Prince Mugrin, Saudi Chief of Intelligence. Zebari said he conveyed a strong message to the Saudis that they "were not doing enough" to help Iraq and that the GOI has "shown restraint" by not publicly criticizing the Saudis inaction. "We expect more from them," Zebari concluded.

¶8. (C) The FM outlined concrete steps for the Saudis beginning with "not taking sides," and including support of the Baghdad Security Plan (BSP). On security and intelligence cooperation Zebari said that previous meetings

"went nowhere." For example, he continued, the GOI has detained since 2003 in Erbil two terrorists who are on Saudi Arabia's 37 "Most Wanted" list. The Saudis have never even asked about these two individuals or requested their extradition. The Saudis complain about Iraqis smuggling drugs and weapons into Saudi Arabia, Zebari said, but there are many Saudis who were arrested in Iraq. Iraq is ready to engage with Saudi Arabia, Zebari said, and by opening the Embassy in Riyadh and a Consulate in Jeddah, the GOI has demonstrated this willingness.

¶9. (C) The Shia-Sunni divide, the FM said, is Saudi Arabia's "greatest concern." They are, he said, "obsessed" with Iran and "the sectarian nature of the GOI." Zebari said that when speaking with Saudi officials on this issue, he emphasized that the Saudis "were speaking to the wrong people." The Sunnis who visit them - Harith al-Dari (chairman, Association of Muslim Scholars), Salih al-Mutlak (National Iraqi Front leader) and Abdunnassar al-Janabi (National Dialogue Council) - "might be politicians but they are not the true Sunni representatives," Zebari stated. The Saudis need to reach out to all Sunni communities, Zebari summarized, and in doing so they should not forget the Kurds or the Shia. Zebari said he recommended to the Saudis that they "enhance Iraqi independence from Iran," by finding common ground with the Shia leadership and by stopping antagonistic comments which push the Iraqi leaders towards Iran.

PAKISTAN TO HOLD CONFERENCE EXAMINING SHIA-SUNNI DIVIDE

¶10. (C) While in Saudi Arabia, Zebari learned that Pakistan is planning to host a conference to discuss the Shia-Sunni divide. They intend to invite the "key" Islamic countries: Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan, Malaysia and Turkey. Zebari said he advised the Pakistanis to invite the Iranians if the conference will focus on sectarian issues. Otherwise, he noted, the conference outcomes "will be rejected."
KHALILZAD